

A Definitive Approach to the Concept of Communities: Identifying Issues for Community-Based Research in Clayoquot Sound

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Community-based research (CBR) is a term that is used broadly to describe “a spectrum of research that actively engages community members or groups to various degrees, ranging from community participation to community initiation and control of research” (Bannister 2005). The active engagement of communities as more than just “subjects” of research sets CBR apart from more conventional forms of research in both methodology and philosophy. Therefore, numerous social, political and logistical issues come up in CBR that don’t otherwise tend to arise.

Addressing the issues pertaining to CBR is a complex but important exercise. Many different factors can play a role in defining the issues, which differ depending on the diversities within individual communities. While certain principles and protocols can be expected of CBR in general, such as adhering to minimum ethical standards for university researchers and following any local community research guidelines, as specified (for example) in the *Standard of Conduct for Research in Northern Barkley and Clayoquot Sound Communities* (Clayoquot Alliance for Research Education and Training 2003), it is important that the specific research to take place in any given community occurs with emphasis on the needs and priorities of the local residents as well as considerations of the potential positive and negative impacts on them. The obligations researchers have to those communities must be defined and carefully considered.

Within most communities, however, there is a range of priorities and viewpoints, and finding common ground can be a difficult task. A related issue that underlies this difficulty is defining the very community or communities that CBR is based in and upon. Who or what qualifies as a “community”, and which community or communities in particular are to be involved in the research process? This is crucial to both the conception and the practice of CBR as it is the community engagement that differentiates this type of research from other forms. However, what constitutes a community is complex, and many considerations need to be taken into account for a comprehensive understanding.

This paper takes a step back from CBR itself to consider the underlying question of who exactly is “the community” in CBR? I use the Clayoquot Sound region as a specific context to examine this question and the broader implications for community-based researchers. My point of reference is a nine-day field trip to Clayoquot Sound on the west coast of Vancouver Island, that I participated in as part of a fourth year university course on CBR. During the trip I was exposed to a number of differing viewpoints on land use and logging in the area. I begin this paper by presenting an encompassing dictionary definition of communities, and from this I identify relevant subgroups in the Clayoquot Sound region in relation to current environmental issues, specifically land use. I draw upon this exercise to discuss the broader importance and implications for researchers of understanding both the concept and the reality of “community” in CBR.

Identifying Communities in Clayoquot Sound

Over the dates of May 9 through May 17, 2005, I was introduced to the Clayoquot Sound region as part of the field component of an environmental studies course through the University of Victoria¹. Even in this short period of time, it was evident that Clayoquot Sound was a unique area of cultural and environmental richness and diversity. The first thing most visitors might notice of the region is its magnificent environmental attributes. All one has to do, is take a look at the ecotourism industry around Tofino and it is clear that this beautiful area is appreciated by people from many walks of life for the seemingly untouched beauty of its natural landscape. The 2001 statistics on the Tofino-Long Beach Chamber of Commerce website² state that while 27% of visitors come from within B.C., many come from elsewhere, including 21% from other provinces in Canada, 15% from the rest of North America, 25% from Europe, and 12% from Asia and Australia combined. The main purpose of these visits is listed as being 56% sightseeing and 39% outdoor wilderness, with the remaining activities of the region add up to a mere 5% of the total attraction.

But, as seems to often be the case, visitors rarely get the story of an area in its entirety without being exposed to many of the realities of the permanent residents. After talking to some of the community members of the Clayoquot Sound region during our course, it became quickly apparent that many different communities are coexisting there with a wide range of wants, needs and ambitions. With the course having a specific focus on the issues and topics surrounding CBR, I was encouraged to consider the importance of this coexistence. What makes a community? Community is defined in the Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary as "A unified body of individuals, where unified can be defined in a number of ways"³. The following table (Table 1) further defines what is meant by "unified" and identifies particular groups in the Clayoquot Sound region that I was exposed to during my course within the boundaries of each definition.

¹ ES 481A: Community-based Research in Clayoquot Sound. Summer Session 2005. School of Environmental Studies, University of Victoria.

² Tofino-Long Beach Chamber of Commerce. *History and Demographic Information*, retrieved June 19, 2005 from <http://www.island.net/~tofino/tcabout.htm>

³ Definition taken from Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary, retrieved June 21, 2005 from <http://www.merriam-webster.com/>

Table 1: Definitions and Identification of Communities in Clayoquot Sound.

Definition ⁴	Description	Examples of applicable groups in the region
# 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People with common interests living in a particular area 	Conservation biologists and local environmentalists; Loggers/forestry workers; First nations – Central Region Nuu-chah-nulth; Tourism industry (ecotourism, local art galleries, etc.)
# 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An interacting population of various kinds of individuals (as species) in a common location 	Biological ecosystems; Local flora and fauna with local wildlife; Communities of Tofino and Ucluelet with First Nations communities and Boat Basin Foundation
# 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A group of people with a common characteristic or interest living together within a larger society 	Academics; University researchers; environmentalists; Businesses – ecotourism, local craftsmen/artisans, industry;
# 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A group linked by a common policy 	Nuu-chah-nulth to Interfor and Iisaak; logging industry to local and provincial governments
# 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A body of persons or nations having a common history or common social, economic, and political interests 	Nuu-chah-nulth First Nations; communities of Tofino and Ucluelet
# 6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A body of persons of common and especially professional interests scattered through a larger society 	Academics; Conservationists/ Environmentalists; Logging companies (Interfor, Iisaak Forest Resources) and their customers

Based on the above definitions, we can see from Table 1 that many different communities coexist in the region. An overlying theme within all these definitions of community is the concept of connections within and between groups of people or organisms. For the purposes of this paper, three main sectors with interests in the region can be identified, with many smaller groups or organizations within each one. These are: First Nations communities; academic communities; and all other communities i.e.: non-academic/non-aboriginal communities, governmental and non-governmental organizations and local non-native communities. It is important for researchers to realize the overlapping within these groups and that a general attitude of respect and collaboration is in the interests of all communities. The following table (Table 2) gives a list of some of the communities and organizations within each of these sectors.

⁴ Six part definition taken from Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary, retrieved June 21, 2005 from <http://www.merriam-webster.com/>

Table 2: Three main community sectors in Clayoquot Sound and some of the groups within them⁵

Sector	Communities and Organizations Within Sector
First Nations Communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Central Region Nuu-chah-nulth First Nations <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Hesquiaht ◦ Tla-o-qui-aht ◦ Toquaht ◦ Ucluelet ◦ Ahousaht • Nuu-chah-nulth Central Region Chiefs
Academic Communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • University of Victoria <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Clayoquot Alliance for Research, Education and Training ◦ POLIS ◦ UVIC Whale Research Lab
Other Communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Logging companies and industry workers <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ lisaak ◦ Interfor • Local Governments <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Tofino Municipal Government ◦ Ucluelet Municipal Government • Parks Canada and BC Parks <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Pacific Rim National Park • UNESCO Biosphere Reserve • Non Governmental Organizations <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Raincoast Interpretive Centre ◦ Clayoquot Biosphere Trust ◦ Friends of Clayoquot Sound • Central Region Board

People with common interests living in the Clayoquot Sound area include various non-profit environmental research, education and conservation organizations such as the Raincoast Interpretive Centre, Clayoquot Biosphere Trust, and Friends of Clayoquot Sound. Such groups work together as well as on their own to achieve environmental initiatives in the Clayoquot Sound region. Local academics and experts in various fields such as two community partners for this course, conservation biologist Barb Beasley, and Stan Boychuck (executive director of Clayoquot Biosphere Trust), can work for and alongside groups such as these and often in partnership with them. These groups work within frameworks laid out by local governmental agencies and endeavor to follow proper protocols articulated by First Nations communities.

Also having an important influence on the region are the area's main logging companies: International Forest Products (Interfor), and lisaak Forest Resources, together logging 100,000

⁵ Information retrieved and compiled June 15-18, 2005 from Clayoquot Alliance for Research Education and Training (CLARET) website <http://www.clayoquotalliance.uvic.ca/>, Nuu-chah-nulth Tribal Council website <http://www.nuuchahnulth.org/>, and Friends of Clayoquot Sound website <http://www.focs.ca>.

to 150,000 cubic metres of forest annually. According to information provided by Friends of Clayoquot Sound, 85% of this logging is of old growth forest.⁶ The issue of old growth forest management is of particular concern in the Clayoquot Sound region and many differing sentiments are present. Even on our short trip to the region it was apparent that not all members of the greater community shared the same outlook. Logging and land use management serve as a great example of the overlapping interests of various communities as there is a wide spectrum of differing viewpoints between and within First Nations and non-aboriginal communities.

Amongst these communities whose voices are to be considered are the Central Region Nuu-chah-nulth First Nations who have inhabited this particular region since long before the arrival of European settlers. Archaeological evidence indicates that the Nuu-chah-nulth presence goes back at least 5000 to 7000 years⁷. It is highly important that the views of the Nuu-chah-nulth people are recognized in considering land use issues in the region as the decisions made relate directly to their ancestral land. Their culture and cultural practices need to be integrated and respected in decisions that affect them. As of July 6, 1995⁸, the government of British Columbia accepted the recommendations of the Clayoquot Sound Scientific Panel (CSSP) and “committed to working with companies, workers, and First Nations to ensure that the CSSP recommendations were implemented in their entirety”(CSSP 1995). Included in the Panel’s recommendations is the requirement that “full consultation and active participation of the Nuu-chah-nulth in planning and decision making processes, in all operational forestry activities,”⁹ takes place.

As a researcher in the Clayoquot Sound region, it would be inappropriate to ignore the views of Nuu-chah-nulth community members and tribal council and, depending on the nature of the research, this might be detrimental as the local input could be invaluable in enhancing the quality of the research. However, again depending on the nature of the research, community based researchers may want to involve a wider spectrum (or perhaps different sector) of the community than just political leaders. While formal processes for First Nations community consultation by industry have been put into place, the same processes may not be adequate for use by researchers who seek to work with a wider variety of community voices than would be heard by industry. The predicament arises then, that it can prove extremely difficult (both politically and practically) for a researcher to ascertain a wide range of views and participation that is representative of the diversity in the community. This may or may not be essential to the objectives of the study, but it should be considered in the design and interpretation.

In a First Nations context, there can be the added challenge of differing cultural understandings and interpretations of cultural practices. Take for example two important Nuu-chah-nulth concepts: */isaak* – meaning respect for all things; and *Hishuk-ish ts’awalk* – a concept that states that everything is one and that all is interconnected¹⁰. The Central region Nuu-chah-nulth Nations, namely Tla-o-qui-aht, Hesquiaht, Ahousaht, Ucluelet, and Toquaht¹¹, have long held these concepts as guiding philosophies and it may reasonably be assumed that they were

⁶ Friends of Clayoquot Sound. (2005, June 15). *Logging History*, retrieved June 16, 2005, from <http://www.focs.ca/logging/history.asp>

⁷ Royal British Columbia Museum and Nuu-Chah-Nulth Tribal Council website: *Out of the Mist*, retrieved June 17, 2005, from <http://www.amerimumi.org/nations/en/index.htm>

⁸ Iisaak Forest Resources, retrieved July 26, 2005, from <http://www.iisaak.com/sciencepanel.html>

¹⁰ Nuu-chah-nulth Tribal Council website, retrieved June 16, 2005, from <http://www.nuuchahnulth.org/>

¹¹ Nuu-chah-nulth Tribal Council website, retrieved June 17, 2005, from <http://www.nuuchahnulth.org/>

implemented in their methods of land use. It seems that the implications of these principles are being interpreted in somewhat different manners amongst present members of these communities, especially in the forestry industry. During the field component, our group was given the privilege of hearing the thoughts of two members of the First Nations led forest services company called, *Iisaak*¹², Cecil Sabbas and Richard Lucas. They believe logging to be an important economic necessity for the Hesquiaht people and that the aforementioned philosophies suggest that forestry must be done in a self-sufficient manner maintaining a priority of land stewardship, respect, and awareness of the effects that resource extraction may have on the local ecosystems. To them, *Iisaak* and *Hishuk-ish ts'awalk* are maintained by a reciprocal relationship with the land, taking trees for their economic well being and in return, aiding and restoring damaged ecosystems often in collaboration with Interfor. This belief is embodied in the business ethic of the company, *Iisaak*, which was originally founded as a joint venture between international logging company Weyerhaeuser and Central Region Nuu-chah-nulth First Nations¹³. However, we heard from other community members who view logging as a direct contradiction to their guiding philosophies. Steven Charleson, a member of the Hesquiaht community and former Chief Councilor of the Hesquiaht First Nation, believes that every tree on the land is important to the ecosystem and that for-profit industrial logging practices contradict the principles of interconnectedness and respect for all things. He sees the harmful effects of the industry firsthand. Loss of wildlife habitat and depleted fish populations in rivers caused by landslides from eroding logging roads are to Steven, an all too common sight.

Our class was presented with a number of opinions on logging and land use throughout the duration of the course and many of them contradicted one another. One community member whom we spoke with believed that the practices of Interfor had failed to generate the substantial wealth from the logging of the region that was possible. Another community member thought that Interfor was making plenty of profit and pointed out that Interfor had recently made a large donation to the University of British Columbia's Forestry Program. Upon further investigation, I discovered that Interfor's Chairman and former Chief Executive Officer, Dr. William L. Sauder had made a private donation of 20 million dollars to UBC's Faculty of Commerce and Business Administration¹⁴. While this donation did not directly come from the company itself, it seems reasonable to assume that the money for it may have been acquired indirectly if not directly from logging profits. So it seems that wealth is being generated somewhere for Interfor in order for a donation this large to be possible. Regardless, some community members within Clayoquot Sound region believe that a great deal more wealth could be generated through value-enhancing techniques that would stimulate more economic growth within local communities.

In terms of CBR, as a result of such differences in local opinions, it would be difficult for the community-based researcher to accommodate views representative of all community members for a project related to land use in order for the research to be all encompassing and inclusive. The researcher may have difficult decisions as to which opinions will be considered and what weight will be given to each one. In some cases, opinions, which may be in the minority, could hold equal or even greater importance to more commonly held attitudes. This dilemma presents a significant challenge to community-based researchers.

¹² *Iisaak Forest Resources*, retrieved June 18, 2005 from <http://www.iisaak.com/>

¹³ In 2005 the company's ownership was given solely to the Central Region First Nations. This information retrieved June 19, 2005, from <http://www.focs.ca/logging/iisaak.asp>

¹⁴ UBC Commerce n.d., retrieved June 16, 2005, from <http://www.sauder.ubc.ca/announcements/sauder/>

Other issues might arise in meeting expectations and fulfilling obligations, especially if there are obligations to more than one entity. For example, different expectations may stem from research on land use commissioned by a non-profit organisation compared with industry. And both of these would be different than academic research supported by public funds and conducted at a university. Often, industry will have specific protocols and universities will have a set of guidelines to be followed if the research involves people¹⁵. Obligations to the providers of funding could affect decisions regarding which community members are focused on. For instance, a company wanting to publish research showing the benefits they produce within a given community might include the views of community members who have benefited from them in some way, while failing to include viewpoints of those community members who may have suffered negatively from the companies actions. Also, personal objectives of the researcher may not align themselves with the interests of all communities and community members and difficulties could arise in maintaining mutual respect. Expectations of the communities being studied could have a significant sway on the outcome of the research. Community members who are aware of the effects the studies might have on their communities could potentially attempt to influence the research by omitting elements which could be damaging to their desired outcome, and embellishing elements which could help it. It is important for researchers to understand what is expected of them. As part of a respectful and democratic relationship, an emphasis should be placed, on giving something back to the communities being studied, if only sharing the results in a meaningful way. At the same time, university researchers have responsibilities to their institutions, funders and to the broader academic community to uphold a standard of rigor in their methodology so that their research results are not seen as biased.

Therefore, the importance of a clear understanding of the concept of community is of paramount importance when undertaking CBR. Furthermore, what communities are present in an area and how they overlap must be firmly understood by all researchers involved in order for appropriate research practices to be implemented. Differing points of view are bound to be present and researchers would be wise to assess which ones are of importance to the quality and integrity of the research at hand. Even then, researchers are faced with the difficult task of deciding what information to seek and how to include it in their projects as many external pressures and obligations may be present, combined with limited time and resources.

The region of Clayoquot Sound offers many applicable examples of the wide range of communities that can be present in a given region. The overlapping of the three sectors of Clayoquot communities described here provides a framework for the understanding of the interconnections between and within communities. While it is but one important aspect of a multifaceted topic, once the concept of communities is understood and specific groups are identified within a particular area, their appropriate inclusion in CBR is one step closer to taking place. CBR is indeed a topic nested with theoretical and practical complexities and the particular issues raised within this paper are only fraction of the issues that need to be taken into account. That said, understanding these particular issues are essential in maintaining a level of collaboration and mutual respect in the CBR process, which is in the benefit of all involved.

¹⁵ See the *Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans* <http://www.pre.ethics.gc.ca/english/policystatement/policystatement.cfm> (last accessed July 28, 2005).

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